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Training programme in the Secretariat

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 19 of section A of resolution 45/239 of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly urged the Secretary-General to strengthen the training and retraining capabilities of the Secretariat at all duty stations, and requested him to submit a report to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session on efforts made to implement programmes in the areas of language training, electronic data-processing training, basic supervisory training and the upgrading of the professional knowledge of staff in substantive areas.

2. In recent years, the Office of Human Resources Management has sought to implement training programmes in conformity with recommendation 58 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 1/ which stated that the "content of United Nations training programmes should be strictly geared to the needs of the Organization and their effectiveness carefully monitored to ensure optimum utilization of allocated resources". In gearing programmes to the needs of the Organization, it has been necessary to take into account changes within and outside of the Organization. These include:

(a) The rapid pace of technological change and development and the ever-expanding base of accumulated information and knowledge;

(b) The restructuring of the Organization and reorganization of tasks and functions to respond better to new mandates arising from a greater focus on the peace-keeping and peace-building role of the Organization;

(c) The shift in the role of the Organization towards becoming more operational and the requirement that staff play an active role in operational activities;

(d) The evolution of the Organization to a state where over 75 per cent of its staff are on permanent contracts and the average length of a staff member's career is more than 20 years, which makes the issue of career development critical.

Finally, avenues of inter-agency cooperation have been strengthened in order to make maximum use of scarce training resources and pool the training expertise of each agency.

3. From 1990 to 1992, major administrative and operational changes have been instituted that impact on the implementation of training programmes. These changes entail an increased role of the Office of Human Resources Management in the budgeting and the allocation of resources for training, which has facilitated a truly Secretariat-wide approach to training and a strengthening of the linkages between specific mandates, the needs of the Organization, and the content of training programmes. Evaluation has been included as an essential component of every training programme to ensure effectiveness and

relevance, and guidelines for screening staff applying for training programmes have been developed with a view to achieving maximum training impact on the work of the Secretariat.

II. TRAINING PROGRAMMES

4. The Secretariat has concentrated most of its resources in the delivery of training in the following priority areas:

(a) Developing the comprehensive management development plan;

(b) Offering mission-oriented training for specific peace-keeping and peacemaking operations;

(c) Upgrading of professional knowledge and skills in substantive areas;

(d) Improving the capability of staff to use technological innovations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work;

(e) Providing orientation programmes for newly recruited/promoted staff members;

(f) Enhancing the linguistic and communication capabilities of all United Nations staff;

(g) Evaluation.

A. Comprehensive management development plan

5. It is widely recognized in both the private and the public sector that without effective leadership and management organizations risk wasting valuable human and financial resources. At this time in the United Nations history, the quality of leadership and management is crucial, for this will determine whether the Organization can effectively meet the rising expectations of the world community, succeed in fulfilling new mandates and become more operational in spite of the financial limits placed upon it.

6. The Secretary-General, recognizing the link between managerial skills and effective programme delivery, has decided to implement a comprehensive system of management training. Preparation of this programme was begun in June 1992, as part of a plan of action for improvements in the administrative and management areas. The management training plan sets forth the type of training that would be required for staff from entry into the Organization to the most senior level positions (see annex). The goals of this programme are:

(a) To develop leadership and managerial skills in senior officials in areas such as strategic planning, crisis management, management of technology and management of change in order to ensure quality and consistency in the leadership of the Organization in the 1990s and beyond;

(b) To develop an administrative cadre of staff, at the P-4 level and above, who are well-trained in financial and personnel management, project management, procurement and so on to serve as managers, regardless of their specialization, at any duty station;

(c) To develop the ability of staff at all levels who supervise the work of others to create a positive and supportive environment, as well as to enhance staff productivity through effective performance management.

7. While development of the entire programme must be spread over time as considerable financial requirements are involved, certain priority areas have been identified for concentration within the first six months. These include developing and pilot testing a training module on United Nations administration, which will be an integral part of a mandatory training programme for all staff promoted to managerial positions; developing and pilot testing a senior-level seminar on strategic planning and management of change; and expanding the existing programme of supervisory training to accelerate the training of all staff who supervise the work of others. It is the intention of the Secretariat to develop and test the individual components of the overall programme incrementally and to implement the major priority areas of the entire plan by 1994.

8. To date, although occasional management seminars have been organized for senior officials, efforts in the area of management training have been concentrated primarily on a supervisory training programme, focusing on the basic skills of managing people. Up to 1992, 557 staff, from GS-6 up to D-1, have participated in supervisory skills training, 120 of whom received training between July 1991 and June 1992. The supervisory training programme has already produced visible positive results:

(a) It has provided staff in supervisory positions with basic skills in managing people;

(b) It has improved communications between hierarchical levels within departments or other organizational units.

B. Training for peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building

9. As United Nations peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building tasks have increased, broadened and become more multifaceted, training has become an essential element in enhancing the capability of staff to carry out new functions in these operations. Since the Namibia operation, training has become an integral part of all missions organized by the Secretariat, including Nicaragua, Haiti, Cambodia, Yugoslavia and Angola. The Office of Human Resources Management is involved both in providing mission-specific training programmes and in developing a systematic and sustained programme of training in skills required for peace-keeping/making/building for staff at all duty stations, Secretariat-wide.

10. The programmes to prepare staff for specific missions have so far included three components: (a) orientation to provide staff with basic information about the nature of the mission and its structure, the social and political environment and living, work and health conditions in the mission area; (b) job-related training to develop skills in substantive and technical areas such as electoral administration and computer technologies; and (c) language training in the languages of the mission, including intensive language courses and bilingual phrase books with accompanying cassettes.

11. In addition, the Office is developing long-term programmes in order to ensure that the Organization will have a well-trained cadre of staff prepared to serve in a wide variety of crisis situations around the world. A whole range of skills required for peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building, including administration, leadership, crisis management, conflict resolution, negotiation and logistical planning have been incorporated into the overall management development plan. It is intended that inter-agency efforts will be made in order to strengthen programmes to build skills in key areas required for mission service. Inter-agency cooperation in this regard will be discussed later in this paper.

C. Upgrading substantive and professional skills

12. Upgrading the substantive and professional skills of staff is an area of training that until recently had received little attention. However, the rapidly changing world environment and consequent evolving demands placed on the Organization make it essential that means be provided to upgrade and update the substantive capabilities of staff on a continuous basis. A system of identifying and finding means of filling present and future gaps in required skills and knowledge will not only give the Organization the ability to respond quickly to new mandates and challenges, but will also provide its staff with the necessary growth and development opportunities essential in any high-calibre civil service.

13. The sabbatical leave programme, initiated in 1989, is sponsored jointly by the United Nations Secretariat and the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), a North American academic association. Through this programme, selected professors at universities who are members of ACUNS take up assignments within the United Nations system and United Nations staff members are placed in universities in North America for a maximum period of 10 months to carry out research studies. In order to offset the traditional emphasis of training at Headquarters, the programme so far has been geared to staff members serving in duty stations outside New York with the objective of upgrading their professional knowledge and skills and stimulating their intellectual development. By 1992, 18 staff members had been selected through a competitive selection process. Fourteen of these have already completed their studies in specific topics relating to economics, communications, human development, urban planning and women in society and industry. Based on this experience and owing to the need to utilize existing resources better, the Office of Human Resources Management is considering offering programmes of

shorter duration. It is also contacting universities outside North America in order to explore possibilities for offering greater geographical and occupational diversity in the sabbatical leave programme.

14. When specialized training programmes are not available in the Secretariat or it is not cost-effective to organize in-house training, staff are sent to outside institutions and universities to take the required training courses. The external studies programme has been the principal means for the upgrading and development of professional knowledge and technical skills of staff members. During the past two years, 799 staff members have benefited from this programme. Of these, 471 participants are from the General Service and related categories. The programme has been instrumental in enhancing electronic data-processing skills for staff members serving in small and remote duty stations, including 79 staff of United Nations information centres in 29 countries.

Special projects to institutionalize the upgrading of substantive and professional skills at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

15. For 1992, the Government of Japan agreed, on an experimental basis, to fund out of the Trust Fund for Interest on the Contribution to the United Nations Special Account a project to establish the basis for an ongoing programme of training and development to upgrade the substantive skills and knowledge of professional staff in two of the regional commissions, ECA and ESCAP. The project coincides with organizational change efforts now under way in the two commissions to refocus their goals and priorities and review their structures. The training planned will be closely linked to new goals and directions of the commissions and will be designed to facilitate organizational change by developing the necessary staff capabilities.

16. In ECA, various capacity-building measures, endorsed by the Conference of Ministers in its April 1992 session, have been planned to increase the impact and effectiveness of the Commission and make it a "centre of excellence in the region". 2/ Staff training will be a key element in capacity-building. The pilot training project will establish programmes to develop further the expertise of staff in programme and project formulation, monitoring and evaluation in order to enhance the quality of ECA programmes and projects. In addition, a programme of substantive seminars will be established to ensure that staff are kept abreast of current research and state-of-the-art technologies in the key areas of the work of ECA.

17. In ESCAP, the restructuring of the Commission to correspond to six major "themes" or areas of focus for its work, as well as political and socio-economic changes in the region, will result in new challenges and new mandates for the Commission. Training will be an important element in preparing staff to meet these challenges. Elements proposed for the training project in ESCAP include training programmes in building and managing interdisciplinary work teams, formulating multisectoral projects, developing appraisal criteria and conducting impact evaluations. Another element will be

to assess new mandates and new areas of work into which ESCAP is moving in order to identify gaps in the expertise needed, as well as to survey regional training resources in order to locate the most cost-effective ways of meeting emerging training requirements. A major training requirement already identified is the need to develop greater expertise in the use of computer technology to support data collection and analysis. The training project will therefore also include a component to establish training programmes in core electronic data-processing skills as well as in applications software to be used in connection with substantive work.

18. Based on the above pilot projects, it is expected that an overall systematic approach to the upgrading of substantive skills and knowledge would take place at other regional commissions and duty stations as resources become available.

D. Improving staff technological skills

19. Over the past five years the Secretariat has undergone significant changes in its computer resources, where personal computers have become widely available and access to a variety of communications networks and informational databases is becoming easier and more widespread. The ability to use telecommunications to tap into computer resources located thousands of miles away is becoming more and more of a reality for the United Nations and promises to contribute greatly to integrating the work being done at various locations around the world.

20. However, to take advantage of the technology now available in today's world requires an investment both in equipment and in the training of staff to take full advantage of the equipment's potential. In the Secretariat, the acquisition of new technology has proceeded at an impressive rate and the challenges of taking staff into this new computerized environment has been daunting.

21. To meet this challenge, the Office of Human Resources Management makes available to the Secretariat three types of computer training, each one of which is important to the notion of technological innovations:

(a) Core training, which emphasizes the basic computer skills that all staff having computer access should possess and aims at promoting "computer literacy" throughout the Organization;

(b) Advanced training, which focuses on the use of United Nations standard database, spreadsheet, desktop publishing and graphics software;

(c) Specialized electronic data-processing training for staff who can serve as computer resource specialists in charge of directing, driving and maintaining office automation efforts. Such persons require training in areas such as systems development and management, telecommunications, local area networks and computer programming.

22. Although much of the Office's efforts up to now have concentrated on the delivery of core training, it is apparent that integration of technological innovations into the workplace depends on having computer specialists who are familiar with the latest developments in the computer field. Therefore, the Office is currently concentrating more of its efforts to encourage computer training in the non-core training areas: advanced software application skills and specialized computer skills.

23. In order to make training opportunities more equitable across all duty stations, the Office has centralized the budget for electronic data-processing training and works with the Technological Innovations Committee at each duty station to distribute the funds. In addition, the means for using telecommunication resources to make training materials more readily available Secretariat-wide are being investigated.

24. Finally, training issues are an integral part of the discussion of the Technological Innovations Board, which works with the Technological Innovations Committee of each duty station to implement equipment and software standards and to coordinate the use of training resources. Through such coordination efforts it is anticipated that use of training funds can be maximized and that better assessments of the Organization's training needs can be made on an ongoing basis. A preliminary implementation of this process has indicated that the training requirements of the Secretariat in the electronic data-processing area will increase significantly in the biennium 1994-1995.

E. Providing orientation and induction programmes

25. The manner in which newly recruited and appointed staff are introduced to the Organization makes a significant difference in their adjustment to the work environment of the United Nations. The orientation and induction programmes are therefore important components of the training programme. Two types of programmes are included: one geared to newly recruited staff at all grade levels and the other to junior Professional staff either promoted or recruited through competitive examinations. Both of these activities have been systematically conducted at Headquarters and efforts are now being made to prepare training materials aided by video cassettes to implement the programme throughout the Secretariat.

26. The orientation programme introduces newly recruited staff members to the work of the United Nations Secretariat. The programme provides an overview of the structure and history of the Organization, conveys the administrative policies relevant to staff members as well as important information on the living conditions at the duty station. Between July 1991 and June 1992, 200 staff members participated in this programme in New York.

27. This programme has been redesigned so as to render it applicable to all duty stations. The role of the receiving departments and supervisor has been enhanced. A video has been produced for use Secretariat-wide as the core of this programme. In addition, various modules are being designed to supplement

the core orientation programme: "telephone and communication skills" and "an orientation to writing practices at the United Nations". The second stage of the new design will include the following two new elements, which will be available in 1993:

(a) An orientation handbook for newly recruited staff;

(b) A set of guidelines to assist each duty station to enhance or organize its own orientation sessions.

Orientation programme for successful candidates from the national competitive and the G to P examinations

28. In order to provide for a smooth entry into the Professional category of staff, successful candidates from the G to P examinations and the national competitive examinations require certain training and information, as do other new staff members. This includes conditions of work, living conditions in a new duty station and requirements of specific jobs. On the basis of the experience at Headquarters, this programme will now be offered throughout the Secretariat. This programme is complemented by systematic interviews of immediate supervisors to ensure that a good supervisor-supervisee relationship is established from the very beginning. Three-month and six-month follow-up of progress of newly recruited and appointed staff will be conducted throughout the Secretariat in the coming year.

F. Enhancing the linguistic and communication skills of staff

Language training

29. The language training programme formulates, implements and reviews the language training programmes of the Organization in accordance with relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. At Headquarters and at the major duty stations, the programme plans, organizes and administers classes in the six official languages - Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish - in order to promote linguistic balance within the Secretariat and to improve the language capabilities of its staff as mandated by General Assembly resolutions 2480 B (XXIII) of 21 December 1968 and 43/224 D of 21 December 1988. The aim of these courses is to provide staff members with the opportunity to achieve proficiency in the official languages. Each term, more than 2,000 staff Secretariat-wide participate in language courses. The United Nations language proficiency examination, which is administered twice a year at all duty stations, is the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language. In 1992, of the 622 Secretariat candidates who sat for the examination approximately 67 per cent were successful.

30. For offices away from Headquarters, the Language Training Service at Headquarters provides pedagogical assistance. The United Nations Language Training Newsletter offers a forum for teachers and administrators at the different centres to be informed of pedagogical developments at different

centres and to foster closer relations. The exchange of teachers between different centres is being explored as a way to promote further the sharing of resources and ideas among duty stations.

Communication skills training

31. Language training for the 1990s will emphasize communication skills aimed at improving job performance and career development potential. A communications component is now being established to include drafting skills, meeting and negotiating skills, oral presentations and dealing with the media in the working languages. To meet the job-related needs of staff members for oral communication skills, the Office of Human Resources Management is piloting a course on conference and meeting skills in French in the autumn of 1992. This course, along with the existing drafting and English pronunciation courses, will form the basis of the communications skills training programme.

32. In resolution 38/32 E of 25 November 1983 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to examine ways of improving the drafting skills of Secretariat officials who are involved in the various phases of preparing final reports of United Nations bodies with a view to ensuring the production of more concise reports". The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its report on the programme budget for the biennium 1990-1991 3/ recommended that "efforts should be made to upgrade the drafting and editorial abilities of the Secretariat as a whole, inter alia, through the expansion of efforts by the Training Service in this area".

33. To achieve these goals, a core writing component has been developed not only to meet the general writing needs of staff members who are required to draft regularly in their jobs, but also to meet the special needs of individual departments. Core writing training includes three courses: orientation to writing for the Organization (a part of the orientation programme), advanced writing: drafting letters and memoranda, and the principles of report writing, which focuses on reports of the Secretary-General. The core writing component is being implemented in 1992. In early 1993, expository writing to improve basic writing skills will be implemented. In addition, at the request of departments, specialized writing courses have been delivered to improve staff members' job-related drafting abilities. In the biennium 1990-1991, specialized technical writing workshops were held for the United Nations Offices at Vienna, the Electronic Services Division, the Internal Audit Division at Headquarters and Geneva, and personnel officers at Headquarters and Vienna.

34. In the last five years, the language training programme has undertaken other specialized courses to improve the job-related linguistic skills of staff members. Interpreters and translators have taken specialized language courses in Arabic, Russian and Spanish to refresh their abilities to work in these official languages. This training aims to expand staff members' capabilities in dealing with the languages used by the Organization.

Language training for peace-keeping/peacemaking

35. The expertise of the language training programme is now being used to enhance the linguistic skills of staff members assigned to peace-keeping and peacemaking missions in the languages required for the mission. For example, the Training Service developed self-study materials in Arabic for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and these materials are currently being used by the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). In collaboration with the Field Operations Division of the Office of General Services, the Training Service helped develop the English/Khmer phrase book and cassette currently being used by the United Nations Translation Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). A French/Khmer phrase book is now being developed. Intensive refresher courses in French are now being offered for staff members applying to UNTAC. These have proved to be quite successful and the experience gained so far has provided a model for language-specific training for future mission assignments.

III. EVALUATION OF TRAINING

36. Following recommendation 58 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts mentioned in paragraph 2 above and General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, efforts have been continued, in conjunction with evaluation workshops sponsored by the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, to develop evaluation tools for monitoring the utilization of allocated training resources.

37. The difficulty of evaluating training activities has been recognized by all those concerned with the development of training programmes in academic, private and public sectors. While training in areas such as technology or language can be evaluated relatively easily to determine if skills have been acquired, management training, for example, requires long-term monitoring to assess its effectiveness. Also, the evaluation of a management training programme must take into account other interacting factors such as the working environment. Despite the complexities of measuring the effectiveness of training programmes, it has been decided, pending the outcome of the current efforts by the Subcommittee on Training of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions to set guidelines and evaluation tools to make some form of evaluation, however rudimentary, a necessary component of every training activity. For example, tests are given at the end of each semester for the students in language classes and follow-up interviews are conducted with the supervisors and supervisees in the supervisory training courses. Together with evaluation, frequent monitoring of the progress of the training activities is being carried out to assess effectiveness.

IV. STRENGTHENING INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

38. During the reporting period, special efforts have been made to strengthen inter-agency cooperation through the Subcommittee on Training of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions. Examples of areas where training efforts can be shared include crisis management, security questions and human rights issues. Through sharing programmes or expertise from other organizations, the Secretariat has benefited from the experience and technical know-how of the agencies specializing in certain areas relevant to newly emerging operational activities of the United Nations.

39. Such cooperation should bring about a number of benefits, which include avoidance of duplication of materials, fullest utilization of the expertise and technical know-how of specialized organizations and agencies, and financial savings through the sharing of training programmes and materials.

V. BUDGETARY ARRANGEMENTS

40. Following the decision to implement a centralized budgetary process for training, all departments and offices prepared an estimate of their training requirements for the biennium 1992-1993. These estimates, together with programme plans, were reviewed at Headquarters and the Office of Human Resources Management conducted systematic consultations with regional commissions, offices and departments in order to determine how to put the limited resources where they were most needed. This budgetary exercise made it possible for all organizational units to formulate a biennial training plan indicating priority areas.

41. While the centralized budget exercise was beneficial in that it required every office to identify priority training needs, it also served to indicate the serious gap between the training requirements of over 10,000 staff Secretariat-wide and the actual resources available for training. Indeed, the current level of investment by the Organization in staff in the form of training is extremely low. At this time, the United Nations devotes 0.29 per cent of its staff costs to occupational and management training, 4/ while other comparable United Nations entities within the Organization spend as much as 2 per cent of staff costs and some national Governments up to 3 per cent.

42. At this time in the Organization's history, the demands being placed upon it are great and the expectations high, while, at the same time, the resources available are limited. Since the major resource of the United Nations is its staff, it is crucial that the maximum potential be derived from this resource. It is therefore now time for the Organization to establish a basic staff development policy, which would include budgetary guidelines for ensuring systematic investment in staff. Such an investment should be seen as a long-term investment in the health of the Organization.

VI. CONCLUSION

43. As the Organization enters a new era, the role of training takes on increasing importance in its commitment to achieving the following principal objectives:

(a) Ensuring that staff in the political areas develop skills for meeting new challenges in the area of preventive diplomacy, including information analysis, negotiation and crisis management; and that staff working in the economic and social sectors, particularly in the regional economic commissions, have strong, up-to-date substantive expertise that will enable them to contribute significantly to the economic and social development of the regions they serve;

(b) Ensuring that a cadre of well-trained, capable staff is developed to provide effective and efficient administration and management in the Organization, with an emphasis on financial management, and that sufficient numbers of trained and technically skilled staff are ready to be mobilized for missions or any other assignment throughout the world.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

2/ E/ECA/CM.18/4.

3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/45/7/Add.1), para. 4.

4/ The figure of 0.29 per cent represents the total per annum payroll of $730 million (ACC/1991/PER/R.28) divided by the amount of the budget devoted to occupational and management training, which is $2,127,000.

ANNEX

Comprehensive management development plan

(Supervisory to ASG/USG levels)

	United Nations environment	Work management	Leadership/management of people	Communications	Information technology
Senior officials	Role of senior managers in furthering the goals of the Organization	Strategic planning; logistical planning for large-scale operations	Leadership; managing change; managing for quality	Public and media relations	Technological innovations: strategies and issues
Senior management	Ethics, accountability and responsibility	Problem-solving, decision-making; managing the flow of information; budgetary and financial control Crisis/emergency management	Overcoming resistance to change; fostering creativity and innovation; negotiating skills; managing diversity, gender issues in the workplace	Giving presentations before intergovernmental bodies; managing the writing of others	Decision-making in relation to managing technology in the office
Middle management	United Nations administration: programme planning, monitoring and budgeting; personnel management; procurement and other issues related to general services	Programme and project management: setting goals and objectives; planning, organizing work	Developing staff, creating effective work teams; resolving conflicts; delegating effectively, coaching and counselling	Conducting effective meetings; giving effective oral presentations; preparing reports for the General Assembly and other bodies	Using information systems as a management tool
Senior General Service and junior Professionals	Orientation to the United Nations Understanding the structure of the United Nations, inter-agency and intergovernmental bodies	Time management	Basic principles of supervision; setting job standards, giving feedback, training, evaluating performance, active listening, managing relationships upwards	Drafting letters and memos	United Nations information systems